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## ACTHA INC. NEWS APR - MAY 2010

Newsletter of the  
ACT Herpetological  
Association Inc.

### YOUR COMMITTEE

President	Joe McAuliffe
Vice President	Ric Longmore
Secretary	Angus Kennedy
Treasurer	Margaret Ning
Newsletter Editor	Mandy Conway
Public Officer	<b>John Wombey *</b>
Excursion Officer	<b>Ric Longmore *</b>
Committee Members	Christian Robertson Philip Robertson Dennis Dyer Peter Child Iris Carter
Student Representative	Jake McAuliffe

\* Denotes Life Members



### **Breeding Earless Dragons:**

Joe McAuliffe was our main speaker at the Feb ACTHA Mtg, in which he gave an inspiring talk on the success he has had to date breeding these endearing reptiles, from page 6.



### DIARY DATE

The *bi-monthly* meetings of the Association are held on the **third Tuesday of the month at 7.30pm**, Southern Cross Club, Catchpole Street, Macquarie, Belconnen.

### UPCOMING MEETING

**Tuesday, 20 April 2010**

#### **Guest Speaker:**

**David Hunter**, *Threatened Species Officer  
Biodiversity Conservation Section, South Branch  
NSW Dept of Environment, Climate Change & Water*

**'Putting dots on maps; the simple survey can make the biggest contribution to threatened herpetofauna conservation.'**

Knowing where threatened species occur across the landscape is the basis for implementing the majority of critical recovery actions. David plans to demonstrate this through examples of recent surveys for threatened frog species in south-eastern NSW.

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**Venomous snakes are best left alone:** recent newspaper articles, page 10.

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**Corroboree Frog breeding facility update,** page 11.

**Burrowing into ACTHA's past:** The first year page 12 & 13.

**Brown snake has a water dragon for lunch at the Australian National Botanic Gardens:** story on back page.



*Joe (above) and Angus (below) demonstrating their photographic techniques to members eager to learn how to take great pictures.*



*Dave's son kept an eye on the fire (above).*

*The Copperhead Snake found in a nearby wood pile (below) was carefully retrieved, photographed and released a little further away from the house.*



## ACTHA FIELDTRIP TO NIMMITABEL, 12 - 13 MARCH 2010

*Article & photos by Mandy Conway*

Friday the 12th of March 2010 saw a group of ACTHA members leave Canberra at nightfall for a weekend of reptile spotting and photography at 'Garuwanga', Margaret Ning and Geoff Robertson's conservation property at Nimmitabel, which is just south of Cooma, NSW. Everyone's expectations for the weekend were high.

Saturday dawned a little overcast but once we finished our breakfast, kindly supplied and made by Margaret, we headed off on foot keeping within the general vicinity of the house until the skies cleared, at which point we could travel further afield. Several more members arrived to join the group at this stage, to make a total gathering of 15 people, including children.

The property is some 700 acres and offers considerable scope for not only enjoying the beautiful scenery but also spotting local reptiles. Several small skinks were found and gently retrieved for identification and photos. (Their location was recorded so they could be released exactly where they came from.)

After lunch the enthusiastic group continued their search in other areas. The evening saw a drive to the permanent creek which traverses the property to see if we could identify the frog life. Several frogs and tadpoles were seen under torchlight.

Want to know what we found? Then go to ACTHA's website and look under the 'Forums : Herp Travel' tab. Joe McAuliffe has uploaded photos taken, along with identification details.



*The insect life made for interesting close-ups.*



# CONSERVATION BIOLOGY OF THE GRASSLAND EARLESS DRAGON, *T. PINGUICOLLA*, ON THE MONARO TABLELANDS OF NSW

By Mandy Conway & Tim McGrath



One of our guest speakers at the 16 February ACTHA Meeting was **Tim McGrath**, part-time masters student with the University of Canberra, who gave members a presentation on the significance of the Grassland Earless Dragon, *Tympanocryptis pinguicolla*, and its occurrence

in NSW. Tim also outlined details of his research project which will run over the next three years.

*T. pinguicolla* is listed as endangered in NSW under the 'Threatened Species Conservation Act 1997' and nationally under the 'Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999'.

The Monaro Tablelands of NSW covers the area just north of Cooma, south to Bombala, and contains one of only two remaining populations of *T. pinguicolla*. The ecology of the species on the Monaro Tablelands, which is genetically highly distinct from those in the ACT, is not well understood, with information on the species distribution and habitat requirements particularly lacking.

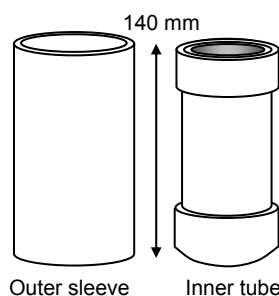
The future of the NSW population is of major concern as it is threatened by habitat degradation through overgrazing, changes in agriculture, rock removal, drought and major wind farm developments. Anecdotal evidence from the Tableland's Kuma Nature Reserve, suggests a severe decline in recent years whilst population viability analyses currently being undertaken for the Canberra population of earless dragons indicate extinction is highly likely in the near future. Only one reserve exists for the species on the Monaro Tablelands and it is likely that a more extensive system of reserves and offsets will be required to ensure the persistence of this and other grassland species.

Tim is currently in the first year of his masters degree and this summer is undertaking a pilot study to determine whether grassland earless dragons still occur at historically known sites from



*Tympanocryptis pinguicolla*, photo by Peter Robertson

around Cooma and Nimmitabel (records from as early as 1993). Tim's other main focus is to test the effectiveness of artificial spider tubes (a technique used to monitor Canberra's earless dragons) in low lying non-rocky areas of native grasslands. From this study Tim will gain a better understanding of the grassland earless dragon in order to finalise his research proposal which will investigate and monitor grassland earless dragons on the Monaro Tablelands over the next three years. In this study he will determine the distribution and habitat requirements of *T. pinguicolla* in NSW in order to provide critical information for future conservation initiatives.



Above: Artificial arthropod burrow, designed by Don Fletcher



Above: Kuma Nature Reserve

## MOLONGLO BIODIVERSITY ISSUES AND THE PINK-TAILED WORM-LIZARD



By Mandy Conway & Geoff Robertson

Another of our guest speakers at the 16 February ACTHA meeting was **Geoff Robertson**.

This is a summary of his presentation, a repeat of a talk he previously gave at a Conservation Council Meeting in December 2009, which addressed what were the

biodiversity issues that the proposed Molonglo development needed to address, especially its impact on the Pink-tailed Worm-lizard (*Aprasia parapulchella*).

### INTRODUCTION

The next area of Canberra to be developed, and indeed, has already commenced, is the North Weston-Molonglo.

Previously largely planted to pine forest or rural lease, it will be turned into a large urban area.

### KEY BIODIVERSITY ISSUES

The Molonglo development will involve large scale land clearing for new dwellings and this will result in a major loss of landscape function and ecological services as well as biodiversity. In particular, the development will result in the destruction of large areas of vegetation communities, namely grasslands, woodlands and riparian areas, including the removal of a large section of the *Casuarina cunninghamiana* community in our region. In respect of fauna, the removal of habitat will negatively impact on raptors, woodland birds and, of particular concern to ACTHA, the Pink-tailed Worm-lizard and woodland birds would be worse-off than most.

### WHAT IS BIODIVERSITY?

Geoff explains. "While 'saving our biodiversity' is becoming a motherhood statement, few people have a good understanding of what it means. Biodiversity is about the variety of life in terms of the variety of ecosystems, the variety of species making up individual ecosystems, and variation within single species. To give you an example, at our property, 'Garuwanga', on a cold January night a few years ago, Ted Edwards, an

entomologist, set up two illuminated sheets not far from each other and over two nights collected about 110 species of moth. He commented that on a typical January night one might expect to capture up to 400 species. This is a good example of the variety of life that we are part of. Closer to our particular interest are reptiles. Many people would not realise that in our region of the Southern Tablelands there are 63 species of reptile. Of course when you clear land for development we remove vegetation and habitat, often referred to as death by a thousand cuts.



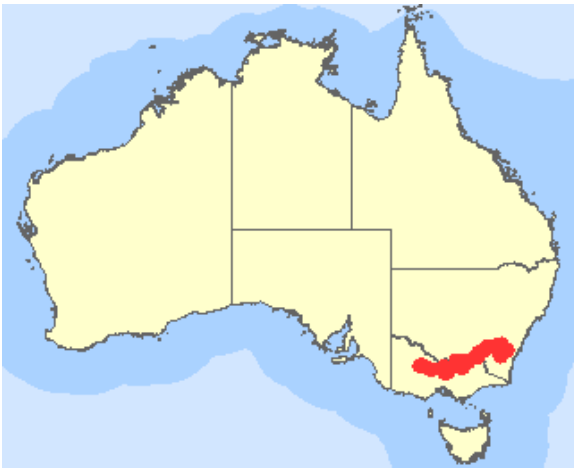
Above: ACT specimen (photo by Ross Bennett)  
Left: Bendigo specimen (photo by Peter Robertson, Museum Victoria)



"To provide another context in the Southern Tablelands region, a recent study shows that many of our vegetation communities have been greatly reduced in size. The following table shows what the various proportions of natural vegetation were in 1788 and what they are now for the Southern Tablelands. The first column states the vegetation community, the area covered by that community in 1788, and the area covered by that community now.

		What is left?
• Grasslands	11%	1%
• Woodlands	11	3%
• Grassland woodland mosaic	23	9%
• Short open forest	38%	21%
• Tall open forest	14%	12%
• Riparian	1%	0.5%
• Other	2%	2%

"It is interesting that while many greenies want to save our forests, our forests have fared relatively better, whereas our grasslands are less than ten percent of their former area. In reality, the percentage of grassland remaining in South East Australia is much less. Canberra and the Monaro have done somewhat better in keeping



**Pink-tailed Worm-lizard Distribution:** Likely once widespread in SE Australia. Now small & disjunct populations. ACT region: Molonglo River & Murrumbidgee River Corridors. Recently found at Bredbo. Elsewhere in NSW: Restricted to one small site near Bathurst and two small hills in farmland near Tarcutta. Vic: Near Bendigo.

their natural temperate grasslands. This is why we also find that this region is home to a few grassland reptiles which are essentially extinct elsewhere, but maybe holding on here.

"Likewise, only 3-5% of woodlands (Yellow Box - Blakely's Red Gum Grassy Woodland (Box Woodland)) survive across south-east Australia, although the portion in the ACT is 30-34%. However, the proposed Molonglo development will remove a significant chunk.

"We have halved our riparian vegetation. The proposed Molonglo development which currently includes a hideous proposal to build the Molonglo Dam will drown a significant portion of the riparian community dominated by *Casuarina cunninghamiana*: (this community has been reduced to 30% of its former area in the ACT)."

### THE PINK-TAILED WORM-LIZARD

Of particular concern is the impact on the Pink-tailed Worm-lizard, *Aprasia parapulchella*. It has a snout to vent length of 14cm (24cm snout-tail) and there are two known colour varieties. This lizard was once widespread in grassland areas of the ACT however its main habitat now centres along the Molonglo and Murrumbidgee River corridors. The area near Coppins Crossing has a strong population, although even here it is fragmented. It is found under rocks in *Themeda* (Kangaroo Grass) grassland. It was once likely widespread in SE Australia but now occurs in small and disjunct populations: one small site near Bathurst and two small hills in farmland near Tarcutta. It was recently found at Bredbo. The Pink-tail Worm-lizard favours open grassland areas

with kangaroo grass, in well drained soil with rocky outcrops or partially buried rocks. It spends a considerable amount of time in burrows below rocks.

A critical development that will impact on this reptile is the proposed suburb of Coombs. 18% of the lizard population would be indirectly impacted by being too close to suburbs, i.e highly vulnerable to people walking their dogs, cat ownership and curious people turning rocks.

In the initial design, 3.6% of the habitat would be directly loss under housing and another 2.4% drowned by the lake. Overall, 24% of the total population's core habitat would be affected, a huge impact on this species.

Murray Evans, who was present on the evening, commented that the Pink-tailed Worm-lizard does not tolerate a change in flora. Once an infusion of exotic plants occurs, taking over the Kangaroo Grass, the lizard starts to dissipate. Geoff wasn't sure why, perhaps a change in the ant colonies they depend on (they primarily eat the pupae and eggs of ants) or some other factor. It's very important to keep the existing areas on which they depend as natural as possible, which is a hard ask right next to a suburb. .

The image and dot points below encapsulate the strategy required to protect this lizard and other fauna and flora.

### Molonglo biodiversity strategies



- Change perceptions - excitement, persistence and no confrontation.
- Stop clearing, mitigate destruction and restore natural landscapes and habitat.
- Reconnect woodlands, grasslands and riparian zones, mitigate threats and restore resilience.
- Special measures to fence and re-link the Pink-tailed Worm-lizard's habitat.
- Resist Molonglo Dam.



## CAPTIVE BREEDING OF THE CENTRAL EARLESS DRAGON, *TYMPANOCRYPTIS CENTRALIS*

By Joe McAuliffe, summarised by Mandy Conway



The Central Earless Dragon is one of eight small lizards belonging to the genus *Tympanocryptis*. This small group of dragons collectively occupies every state in Australia with the exception of Tasmania. The common name 'Earless Dragon' applied to this group of lizards is not entirely accurate. They do have ears: the scientific name *Tympanocryptis* means hidden ear.

The Central Earless Dragon or *Tympanocryptis centralis* is a small species with a snout vent length of 55mm. It is distinguished from other members of the *Tympanocryptis* genera by the presence of distinctly keeled scales on the top of the head, and the neck is much narrower than the base of the head. Perhaps the easiest way to identify this species is by geographic locality. *T. centralis*' natural distribution occurs in central Australia, chiefly from the Western MacDonnell Ranges to far west Northern Territory



near the Western Australian border. Other species, namely *T. cephalus* and *T. lineata*, are only known to overlap with *T. centralis* in the north-eastern part of its range.

Within its recognised range, the Central Earless Dragon is found on stony hills and plains, with predominantly sparse



vegetation cover. In the Western MacDonnell Ranges this species has been observed in areas with embedded and loose rock formations. Males are often seen at the top of the tallest rock overlooking an open flat

area. This not only provides an ideal place to bask but also a vantage point of his territory where he can observe females, rival males and potential predators. Females will also take up position on the tops of rocks, especially when gravid.

Looking for dragons on the rocks is the easiest way to locate them in their natural habitat. During the breeding season, females will spend most of their time in



areas suitable for laying their eggs. At this time they can be difficult to locate as their body pattern and colour help to camouflage them. So good is their ability to blend in with their surroundings that the keen observer may only see them if and when they move just prior to stepping on them. Flat areas with a sparse herbaceous plant growth and fine sandy soils provide ideal nesting sites. Ideal locations in Western MacDonnell Ranges have been observed to contain hundreds of diggings from gravid females.

### CAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

Earless dragon requirements are like those of many other Australian Agamids in that a combination of environmental factors such as heat and light and their variables are important components of successful captive management. Coming from central Australia, these dragons experience daytime maximums of 40°C+ with winter minimums of less than zero degrees. Healthy individuals in the wild may only have a life span of one to two years. Captive earless dragons also have a short lifespan when compared to many other commonly kept dragons with average life expectancy of about two years, although some individuals reaching six to seven years of age have been noted.

### TEMPERATURE AND DAYLIGHT CYCLING

As with the keeping of many Australian Agamids, Central Earless Dragons respond well to the stimulus of a bright, heat emitting light source. Bright light stimulates feeding, breeding and other natural behaviours in the dragons. It is important that the light source itself be suitable for basking dragons that require and benefit from an ultra violet light spectrum. In particular, UVA and UVB.

Several light globe types are suitable for use, each influenced by the enclosure design, construction materials, level of temperature control sophistication, and all need to complement one another. For example, Joe prefers the use of mercury vapour lights as these lights produce a lot of heat. They are generally considered too hot for use in small enclosures though. Some successful light/heat enclosure design examples are given next.

### **2½-foot timber enclosure with no thermostat control**

*Daytime light source:* Dichroic/Halogen 50W  
(basking) Compact florescent (UV10)  
*Night time heat source:* None  
*Summer day to night ratio:* up to 14:10  
*Winter day to night ratio:* 9:15



The light emitters provide a UV light and heat source in one. The night time temperatures are allowed to fluctuate to provide a naturalistic annual temperature cycle. Day and night cycles are maintained at natural levels throughout the year.

### **2½-foot timber enclosure with thermostat control**

*Daytime light source:* Compact florescent (UV10)  
(basking)  
*Night time heat source:* 100W Ceramic controlled by digital day/night cycle thermostat  
*Summer day to night ratio:* up to 14:10  
*Winter day to night ratio:* 9:15



The light emitter provides a UV light source. Day and night time temperatures are controlled by the thermostat / ceramic globe combination. Typical temperature settings on the thermostat are 30°C to 35°C during daylight hours, which are allowed to fall to between 10°C and 15°C at night. Summer night time minimums may be naturally higher, effectively greater than the thermostat night setting. This will result in the heat emitter not coming on and hence allow natural temperature fluctuation throughout the year.

### **120lt (or larger) plastic storage container with no lid**

*Daytime light source:* 125W to 160W Mercury Vapour or 100W+ Neodium globe  
*Night time heat source:* Heat cord under tub, sparsely looped to provide mild heat and only used in winter.  
*Summer day to night ratio:* up to 14:10  
*Winter day to night ratio:* 9:15



This is Joe's preferred method. One light is placed at one end of the enclosure, suspended approximately 6 to 10 inches above the basking site. The heat cord can be run spread out to provide a subtle substrate heat; constantly during the cooler winter months and switched off for the remainder of the year.

### **SUBSTRATE AND FURNISHINGS**

This is only limited to the keeper's imagination and the size of the enclosure the dragons will be kept in. Enclosures can be furnished with all manner of materials in order to create a natural setting. The Alice Springs Desert Park has successfully kept Central Earless Dragons for several years in such a way. Alternatively, enclosures with minimal furnishings are also acceptable.

There are, however, some critical aspects of substrate selection and furnishing that dramatically affect natural behaviours. Dragons like to feel secure at night and earless dragons are no exception. Providing them with night hiding options such as amongst loose sand and pebbles, leaf litter or beneath timber and rocks are some proven methods. The dragons basking spot beneath the light is often a preferred resting place at night due to the use of rocks or bricks which, when the light switches off, continue to radiate stored heat.



Perhaps the most important component in the captive management of the Central Earless Dragon is the selection of the substrate. For successful breeding of this species it is important to provide the female with a suitable medium in which to deposit her eggs. Females can be very particular and fussy when selecting a suitable site in which to lay their eggs. If she is not happy with her options, she will not lay her eggs and may die from being eggbound.



Joe has used a variety of substrates, but all need to fit a common set of needs. The substrate must not be overly compacted. Some substrates like clays and silt based mediums compact more than others and generally these should be avoided. Sand based substrates that allow the dragon to dig into the medium without it collapsing when moist are ideal. Red reptile sand, sandstone sand and loams have all been used.

Accurate substrate depth is another critical factor. A minimum depth of 75mm to 100mm should cover the entire enclosure floor. Some areas should be mounded with additional substrate to provide deeper options for the female to lay. Some females prefer to dig into the base of the mounded substrate whereas others dig anywhere, hence a minimum substrate depth needs to be observed. Most of Joe's females will lay in a depth of 100mm close to or under the basking furnishing, digging multiple test burrows before selecting one in which to deposit her eggs. Once she has laid her eggs she will backfill the burrow with sand, disguising it so well that it is impossible to determine if a burrow even exists.



#### Some Central Earless Dragon Facts

- Adult snout-vent-length 55mm
- Colour generally brown through to brick red
  - Average clutch size 7
  - Minimum clutch size 4
  - Maximum recorded clutch size 15

## DIET

Earless dragons are ferocious feeders and will attack and attempt to eat anything that is large enough to be swallowed. However, it is best to feed them small prey items to avoid digestion issues. A good general rule practised by many keepers is to feed insects that do not exceed the length between the dragons eyes.

Joe's **adult** earless dragons are usually fed small crickets or cockroaches. Flies, flicked in and still mobile, are among their favourite prey. They also enjoy other invertebrates which are occasionally offered. Adult dragons have their food dusted with calcium and vitamin supplements three times per week.

**Hatchling** earless dragons measure only 22mm (svl) and are best fed on up to 1 week old pinhead crickets or cockroaches. The hatchlings will usually not need to feed for one or two days post hatching while they continue to absorb their yolk. Healthy young should be feeding within five days of hatching. If keeping the hatchlings together it is best to provide them with numerous pinheads every feed as they can become quite excited and are prone to bite their siblings tails. As calcium is an important component in the bone development of young dragons, every feed is dusted with calcium and vitamin supplements. This also allows the young dragons to easily see their prey.

One could be forgiven for thinking that dragons which come from the centre of Australia would not need to be provided with additional water. Certainly, adult earless dragons are capable of surviving and prospering without water for consecutive months, obtaining moisture from their prey. Joe's experience has been to lightly mist hatchling and juvenile earless dragons several times per week to aid the digestive



process. This may also help with the absorption of essential elements and vitamins.





## TIDBINBILLA EXTRAVANGZA

*Article & photos by Mandy Conway*

On **Sunday the 11th of April 2010** ACTHA was given the opportunity to have a reptile display to impart one of the Association's key messages: to promote an understanding of herpetofauna so that their habitat is assured.

Over 4000+ people reportedly attended the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve's Free Open Day, with our patch being one of the busiest areas of the day. Aboriginal dance performances and The Great Aussie Bush Show were accompanied by brilliant live music making for a festive atmosphere.

Our well lit enclosures, the gazebo and generator were supplied by Peter Child, Reptiles Inc. and we would like to thank Paula and Derek Child for bringing the equipment out and setting it up. Our display enabled visitors to view the reptiles from ACTHA members to their best advantage and also made it possible for that 'touching experience' the children and their parents always enjoy so much.



## HAWKER PRIMARY SCHOOL FETE

*Article & photos by Mandy Conway*

The Hawker Primary School Fete was held on **Sunday 28 March 2010** and, as in past years, ACTHA was invited to set-up a small display of reptiles.

The display was once again a popular attraction, with many children and equally enthusiastic parents thrilled to be able to see some local animals like the long-neck turtles and bearded dragons as well as animals from further afield, like a carpet python and lace monitor.

A tidy sum of \$465 was raised for the school by gold coin donations from visitors. A decent amount of money was also raised from a couple of ACTHA 'white elephant stall lovers' who took home less \$ but more stuff than they came with!

**Thought for the future:** a prospective new member, Syarifah, came along to help and, as well as reptile handling duties, she spent some time assisting some of us put together tiny puzzle pieces of plastic to make animals. Several members with a sense of humour thought a prerequisite to joining ACTHA should include the ability to make 5 of these little animals at any one event. The tub of plastic bits awaits...



## VENOMOUS SNAKES ARE BEST LEFT ALONE

### GAZZARD PURSUES FORKED TONGUES OF A DIFFERENT KIND

*Article by Michael Inman, reproduced from The Canberra Times, 21 March 2010*

ACT Liberals acting director David Gazzard is used to dealing with slippery customers.

But the political powerbroker found himself confronting a far deadlier foe last summer.

Mr Gazzard completed a Wildcare course in snake-catching and is now a qualified reptile wrangler.

Disappointingly, his new skills have yet to be tested, instead he contents himself with the rough and tumble world of politics.

"I'm now volunteering as a snake catcher but I haven't had a call yet - but I'd like to," Mr Gazzard said.

He decided to take the course after coming across snakes on his 16ha property at Burra in NSW.

The father of three once accidentally chased a brown snake- the second deadliest in the world - under his own house.

The training involved learning snake behaviour, first aid and handling, working up from relatively harmless serpents to the deadly brown snakes.

Graduation involved pulling apart a pile of rubbish to remove a tiger snake.

"It comes down to these myths we've built up about snakes and how dangerous they are," he said.

Killing snakes is illegal in Australia but interaction with humans can have serious consequences.

Accredited snake catchers, such as Mr Gazzard, aim to educate the community to minimise casualties on both sides.

### SNAKE WARNING

*This response to the article at left appeared in the Letters Section of The Canberra Times on 28 March 2010*

Members of the ACT Herpetological Association are concerned about issues raised in the *Sunday Canberra Times* on March 21, by Michael Inman.

The article suggests that residents who have completed a "snake-catching" short course are competent to catch and relocate snakes.

The most common venomous snake in Canberra and surrounds is the eastern brown, a deadly species with the second-most toxic venom yet tested.

This nervous, fast and unpredictable species is more than a match at most attempts to bag it.

The Association discourages such activity by people of all levels of experience and would always prefer not to attempt this if it can be avoided. Snake-catching courses can never replace many years of knowledge and experience gathered by herpetologists.

[Most of the major points raised in the article have little relevance for ACT residents, as wildlife legislation is the prerogative of the ACT Department of Territory and Municipal Services. Wildcare Queanbeyan is a NSW organisation and the responsibility there for snake conservation falls under the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service.] *This section omitted from original letter but included here for general information.*

It should be emphasised that all reptiles are protected in NSW and the ACT and that specific permits must be obtained before any activities concerning these animals are undertaken.

The ACTHA believes the primary role of snake handlers is that of education and helping people in the community to accept, live with and understand snakes.

We hope you can clarify this important issue with your readers.

Joe McAuliffe, president,  
Ric Longmore, vice-president,  
ACTHA



## THE YELLOW-SPOTTED BELL FROG: 'EXTINCT' FROG SPECIES FOUND ALIVE AFTER 30 YEARS

*Initial report by Greg Miskelly for The 7.30 Report,  
4 March 2010*

NSW Environment Minister Frank Sartor has announced that a species of frog has been found alive in a remote creek on private property in the NSW Southern Tablelands region, more than 30 years after it was thought to have become extinct.

NSW Fisheries field scientist Luke Pearce first spotted an unusually coloured bell frog late last year while conducting a native fish survey. He then alerted his colleague, David Hunter, a frog expert with the State's Environment Department, but it was not until a field visit last month that the pair was able to return to identify it.

Dr Hunter, who spends up to six months of the year monitoring remote frog populations, told The 7.30 Report's Rebecca Baillie the initial capture was a once-in-a-lifetime event.

"Luke and I went out to the site, did a frog survey, found one of the bell frogs - and it just so happened to be this Yellow-spotted Bell Frog," Dr Hunter said. "This was definitely the most exciting moment of my career and I will be surprised if I repeat it."

He says the find highlights the important role that private landowners can play in habitat conservation. "The property owner at this

particular site is extremely excited about having this critically endangered frog species on his land, and is very much looking forward to working with us in collaboration towards its conservation," Dr Hunter said.

He warns, however, that the survival of the frog rests on its fragile creek habitat remaining hidden. "We really don't want anyone going to the site, trying to capture the bell frog or photograph it, because that could introduce an unknown pathogen into the population and cause a problem," Dr Hunter said.

A tiny tadpole and frog collection has now been established at Taronga Zoo and there are plans to breed a safety population for re-introduction to the wild.

Scientists warn Australia still has more than 40 threatened frog species, all battling the impact of *Chytridia mycosis*, a devastating fungal disease responsible for amphibian declines world-wide.



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## CORROBOREE FROG UPDATE

**Carly Humphries**, Wildlife Officer, Department of Territory and Municipal Services, forwarded an update on the status of its Corroboree Frog breeding program at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve.

"They are in breeding mode at the moment, croaking like mad, so fingers crossed for a good number of eggs.

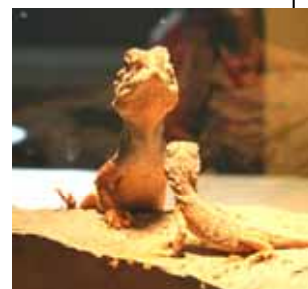
"Field surveys were carried out in February and, although not many were heard out in the bogs, seven male nest sites were flagged.

"In the last week of March the nests were checked and we pulled out 223 eggs to raise in captivity to increase survivorship. Once in captivity for a year we will release those that metamorphose back into the wild. Things are starting to look brighter."

### Note from the Editor to Members who receive a hardcopy of the Newsletter:

In the Feb - Mar 2010 edition, the photo which appeared on page 9 (right) was of Central Netted Dragons, not the Central Earless Dragons referred to in the article. The ACTHA website copy has been amended.

*Ed.*



# BURROWING INTO ACTHA'S PAST

By Mandy Conway

As promised, this issue sees the first installment of a new section where articles from early ACTHA newsletters will be reproduced.

## THE FIRST YEAR...

### SECOND MEETING OF THE A.C.T. HERPETOFAUNA WORKING GROUP

The first meeting of the ACT Herpetofauna Working Group was held on 3 June, 1985, and was attended by 14 people. At the meeting a strong interest was shown in the concept of establishing an ACT herpetofauna working group that would be primarily concerned with documenting aspects of the ecology, distribution, conservation status, management and survey of the ACT reptiles and amphibians. However the general objectives of the group were not resolved, although interest was specifically shown in the following aspects:

- i. Establishing a pro-forma for collecting observations of reptiles and amphibians made in the field.
- ii. Surveying the distribution, abundance, habitat preferences etc. of the uncommon and rare species occurring in the ACT.
- iii. Carrying out herpetofaunal surveys of the Jervis Bay - Beecroft Peninsular region and the Mulligan's Flat area (near Hall).
- iv. Compiling historical (and recent historical) records of the ACT herpetofauna.

Following this meeting K. Henle, A. Georges, K. Day and W. Osborne made up a draft field data sheet that can be used for collecting, summarising and collating field observations. This sheet is enclosed.

It is intended that a second meeting of the working group will be held at the Department of Zoology A.N.U. in the tea room at 6pm on Monday 22 July to discuss the field data sheets and the planning of possible field surveys. In addition at the meeting Arthur Georges will give a short talk on the tortoises of Fraser Island.

Will Osborne  
Klaus Henle  
4-7-85

### Taxa requiring study

Urochordates  
Amphibia  
Sphenodontia  
Aptasia  
Amphibians

Jenkin  
Longman  
Parrish  
Harris  
Henle  
Osborne

Bennett  
Day

3/6/85

Dear Herpetologists,  
Recent discussions, mainly within the Department of Zoology at A.N.U., but also with several other herpetologists in the A.C.T., have shown that there is an interest in initiating an A.C.T. herpetofauna working group. The objectives of this group are outlined below, and will be discussed at an introductory meeting to be held in the tea room, on the lower floor of the Department of Zoology, ANU, on Monday the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June at 6 pm. If you are interested please let us know whether you can attend on the proposed date. (Phone 494074 (Klaus) or 494268 (W.O.)).

### Outline of the project

The following outline of the proposed project should be regarded only as an introduction for discussion during the meeting.

#### 1. Aims

- mapping distributions of species
- recording the ecological requirements, particularly habitat features, of each species
- analysing environmental parameters affecting the distribution of the species
- discussion of zoogeography and abundance/conservation status

#### 2. Suggestion for organisation of the project

- compilation of literature and unpublished notes (first year)
- further field data collecting (second year)
- data processing and preparation for publication (mainly third year)

#### 3. Items for discussion

- uniformity of data collecting and storage methods (use of computer?)
- close co-operation with ACT Conservation Service and N.C.D.C. form of publication
- involvement of interested herpetologists

It is expected that interested herpetologists could become involved by either:

- allowing the working group to use their field notes
- helping in future surveys
- helping with the whole project
- contributing information on a particular herpetofaunal group

Any assistance as a matter of course will be acknowledged.

If you have any further ideas for discussion these could be raised at the meeting planned for 3-6-85.

Regards,  
Klaus Henle  
Will Osborne

Eric Mace  
Jerry Harrison  
Rick Longman  
Hank Jenkins  
John Womley  
Arthur Georges  
Nick Brown  
Kim Day  
Pete Osmy  
Mary Nager

### Jervis Bay Herpetological Survey

Preliminary planning for the herp survey of Jervis Bay has begun. Mike Braysher is organising maps, pitfall traps, and is supervising the selection of the main field sampling sites. The first pitfall traps will be set during a field trip by the Herp. Assoc. and the ACT Conservation Service on the weekend 16/17 November. Long term monitoring of traps will be carried out by C.S. staff at Jervis Bay.

Permit applications are currently being prepared for the ACT Herp Assoc members who have expressed an interest in taking part in the field surveys.

18-10-85

### New frog record for the ACT.

Another species to watch out for in the Canberra region is Litoria latopalmata. Will Osborne and Klaus Henle collected a single individual at a farm dam near Asuarina sands a couple of weeks ago. The specimen is now with John Womley.

### Jervis Bay Survey

A small group from the Herp. Assoc. and from Parks and Conservation are travelling to Jervis Bay this weekend to help install pit traps.

12-11-85



## A.C.T. HERPETOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION



23.12.1985

The first year of our association finished more or less successfully. I am especially pleased that our survey at Jervis Bay is well on its way. Thanks to all who helped in planning and establishing the pitfall trap sites, and especially to Kevin for his enthusiasm in checking the traps. During a one day visit in December I was really surprised by the large number of species and specimens caught. I hope many of you take this as a stimulus to participate in our next trip to Jervis Bay. Mike Braysher booked already beds at the COAE field station and some camp sites for 17.-19. January. The party will leave on Friday night. If you wish to join please contact Mike Braysher on 462017 (Mike will be absent from Canberra from 1.-11.1.86).

In February the Australian Society of Herpetologists will hold its Annual Meeting at Charlotte's Pass/Kosciuszko National Park, February 14.-16.

Because of the Jervis Bay survey in January and the ASH Meeting in February our own meetings at the Zoology Department will be resumed in late February/early March. Interesting talks are still needed for our 1986 meetings. I hope you cover Will Osborne or me with hundreds of offers.

May I remind you to send me your completed data sheets for 1985 and previous years. Will and I promise to give an interim report as soon as we received enough completed data sheets.

With the best wishes for the New Year

Will Osborne

9.8.1985

## THIRD MEETING OF THE A.C.T. HERPETOFAUNA WORKING GROUP

During our second meeting of the ACT Herpetofauna Working Group we decided about our further general procedures in the inventory. In order to get started we need to discuss a few final points:

- I) Legislation (Necessary permits)
- II) Costs of the project (producing of the data sheets)
- III) Organization of the surveys

As we hope to start a first survey already in August we wish to invite you already now to our third meeting

on Monday, 19. August 1985, 18.00p.m.

in the Department of Zoology, Seminar Room

We apologize that we cannot yet include our final data sheet in this letter, but we did not want to postpone our third meeting too long. We will have them ready with explanations and examples for the meeting. Slight alterations can still be incorporated, but we should stick now to the main outline in order to get started. After a year of testing the data sheets in practical use we may be in a better position to judge their advantages and disadvantages.

If we can clarify the final points of our project in time, we may have another talk like Arthur's excellent talk about his turtle work. If you feel like giving a talk, please ring us (494074 or 493057).

Please, feel free to BYO and enjoy the meeting in a relaxed way.

Survey Committee  
 draft her book/press  
 pitfall traps  
 Thursday 7pm  
 quiet space 730pm  
 Class time  
 1st Oct 1985

Summer 19/9/8  
 34/10/85  
 28/11/85

## IN COLD BLOOD: NATURE RED IN FANG AND CLAW

*Source: Sunday Canberra Times, 17 Jan 2010,  
by Michael Inman*

A casual mid-week stroll through the Australian National Botanic Gardens resulted in Iain Cole witnessing a life and death struggle of the animal kingdom.

Mr Cole was leaving the gardens on Wednesday when he heard a splash in the water, a common occurrence when startled water dragons head for safety.

But the splash was followed by a thrashing and Mr Cole decided to investigate.

He discovered a large brown snake gripping a desperately fighting water dragon by the throat.

Fortunately, the avid amateur photographer had his camera at the ready and documents the conflict that ended with the water dragon as the snake's lunch.

"I'm semi-retired, so I like going up to the gardens to photograph whatever takes my fancy," Mr Cole said.

"I very rarely see snakes, but there's lots and lots of water dragons. But this one was obviously out hunting.



"They rolled around in the water for maybe about five minutes at the most, the dragon put up a good fight."

ACTHA President, Joe McAuliffe, said Mr Cole witnessed a rare event.

"The more time you spend in the snakes' habitat, especially in a place like the Gardens, where you've got a large supply of top-quality tucker, your chances will increase dramatically,"

Mr McAuliffe said. "But for most people, the chances of seeing something like that are very remote, a one-in-a-million type thing." He said the encounter displayed the quality of the Garden's ecosystem.

"The fact that we've got a series of major predators, that includes the brown snake, is an indication of the quality of the habitat, so

we're pleased to have them in the Gardens and try to manage all animals collectively."

While Mr McAuliffe admitted Australia's fear of snakes was well founded, he said education was the best way to avoid casualties.



ACTHA News  
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